COMICS NEWS

BEM-16

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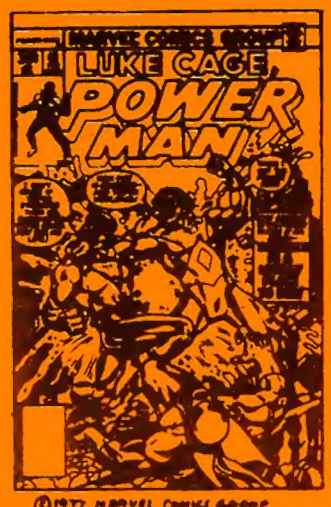

BEM-16 December 1977

editor & publisher: Martin Lock

Plenty of news in and around Bem this time--first of all, Bem-17, out in only two months, will be bigger and even more colourful than ever! And if all goes well each and every Bem subscriber will get a free adzine into the bargain! How is all this possible, you ask? Well, Bem is now incorporating Mike Cruden's FANTASY TRADER --all subscribers for either fanzine will now receive both. For people who buy Bem at a shop, or a Mart, this will only mean the addition to Bem of Mike Cruden as a regular contributor (he's already put his name down to become the main answerer of the letters in Reaction) -- but for those who get Bem by post, it will mean getting a free adzine, with lots of cheap comics (and rare comics!) for sale, every two months or so as well!

And now, the bad news--reluctantly, we are being forced by rising costs to follow our competitors and put up our cover price by 5p, to 20p; we've put this off as long as possible, and we certainly intend to make sure that Bem-17 is worth the extra money. Until the end of the year, we are keeping our old subscription rate of five issues for £1, which means you'll get Bem hot off the presses, before the shops do, for no extra charge! You should find our subscription form nestling somewhere in this Bem--now's the time to fill it in!

As promised last time, this issue sees the debut of a feature by the writer of the longest-running column in fandom--he writes "Comic Collector's Comments" for top US fanzine RBCC, and now Howard Siegel writes "Made In America" for Bem! I know you'll join us in welcoming Howard to the Bem team; he's sure to give us some very interesting insight into American comics and fandom in upcoming issues, and he's starting right now.

Rich Morrissey isn't the only one of our contributors who's now scripting comics stories; Nick Landau has persuaded Hunter Tremayne, Mike Cruden, Mike Lake, and even our eristic editor to script for 2000 AD, and Martin's first "Future-Shock" should be out now, in prog 40, drawn by a fellow who used to be a fan artist (before Bem came along), Trev Goring--and others are close behind!

As usual, we've got new logos, artists, and ideas on parade this time, plus the last instalment of one of our most popular strips. Let us know what you think about all this, hey? Should we have more cover repros, or less? What do you think of the emphasis in Review Section this time? And what topics of general fannish interest would you like to raise in Reaction? The address to send all this to follows -- so let us know what you want, and we'll do our best to bring it to you. -176-671

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KATHOLICITY

Edinburgh in Festival time is an exciting place to live. Where else could you come out of the ballet, go for a brisk run unsuitably clad in evening dress (the buses were on strike, and we couldn't find a taxi) in the rain, with companions cursing and saying 'You conned us into this, if we don't like it we will kill you slowly and painfully', enter a former church, where the seats are still made with the idea of mortifying the flesh, and settle down to see the University of Bradford Drama Group's late night show 'The Private Life of Superman'? (See -- the preceding waffle was relevant!)

I complained recently about the lack of super-heroes in this city. This play did not help much. Superman was rather small, rather skinny, and more than rather oddly clad (red socks and wrestling boots?). Who would fancy that? Who but Lois Lane, in this incarnation the dumbest blonde you ever saw. At least, she fancied Clark Kent, but he didn't return her interest ("I wonder why no-one's ever told her her breath smells"). But all was not lost--a quick spray of Superbreath and the couple are headed for the altar, attended by Lois' best friend Tracy (yep, she's the one that told her) and the Daily Planet Editor, who is called Kowalsky but is a Perry White look-alike complete with cigar. Alas, the marital bliss doesn't last long. At the reception, Clark gets an urgent summons from Batman. But little does he know that Batman, embittered by the loss of Robin (who grew up, won the Mr Universe competition, made a fortune modelling underpants and now lives with a ballet dancer in Teneriffe) has sold out. Batman, explaining to the audience he decided he'd rather concentrate on making money "than dress up like a looney, and ponce around that way" cons the naive Superman into beating up the workers in his Batmobile factory, who were about to go on strike. Then he betrays Superman's apparent brutality to Lois.

After a commercial break for kryptonite chewing gum, which has all the filthy words every child wants to read on the wrapper, we rejoin the story, such as it is. Ten years and eight kids later, Lois and Clark's marriage is not working out. She confronts him with her suspicions. He's always disappearing at odd moments--she has several times seen him sneak out the bedroom window at dead of night, did he think he could fool her forever, she knows his secret--he's got <u>another woman</u>, hasn't he? In despair, Superman decides to leave for the future. But first, he wants one last fight that will leave a glorious memory behind. Enter King Kong (slightly shrunken). Superman wins the fight, but the ape hits him in the back with Green K and, after having to don his hat and glasses before Lois will admit he's her husband, he dies. Kong turns out to be Tracy in disguise. Lois makes a fortune out of writing her memoirs, and she weds Kowalsky. She lives happily ever after --Kowalsky however is miserable.

The whole thing was rude, crude, and very funny. Definitely not for the kiddies--a lady with a small child sitting opposite was looking more and more horrified. What <u>did</u> she expect of a late-night show? Children's shows are put on in the morning or afternoon here. My choice for the funniest line, however, is quite clean. Tracy tells Lois, who has confided her worries about Clark, "The minute I saw that man, I knew he was a fly-by-night!"

There's another play on, called "The Idiot Bastard Son of Superman". I haven't been to see that one -- it's one of those existentialist dramas set in a dustbin--but it struck me the title is a <u>perfect</u> description of half the Super-Sons.

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

ART CREDITS:

Chris Ash: 9 (strip). Dave Byrom: 2 (right). Martin Dutton: 15 (upper). Philip Elliott: 1 (upper), 9 (upper). Dave Hornsby: 11 (left). Joe Matthews: 14. Terry Moore: 13, 15 (strip). Nick Neocleous: 11 (right). Martin Noone: 7 (in logo). Martin & Gerry Noone: 8 (inks). Superswipe: 1 (lower), 8 (pencils), plus 9 logos. Christophe Ta-Min: 2 (left logo), 11 (top). Bob Watkins: 7 (right), 10.

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NEWS

Len Wein has left Marvel. Roger Slifer takes over MARVEL TWO IN ONE, Roger Stern HULK, Roy Thomas THOR, and Marv Wolfman SPIDER-MAN and FANTASTIC FOUR.

Steve Gerber, after a brief flirtation with DC, is back full-time with Marvel. Carmine Infantino is drawing two HOWARD THE DUCK fill-ins, while Val Mayerik is drawing a two-parter featuring Man-Thing, Korrek & Jennifer. Also upcoming: the saga of the Death Store in "Star Waaugh!" Val Mayerik is taking over the drawing of the HTD daily strip, which Garry Friedrich may write for a while. Steve, aside from his MAN-THING tale in RAMPAGING HULK ≠7, is concluding the BLOODSTONE series in RH ≠8 (RH is cancelled with ≠9), scripting a new LILLITH story, and (with Tony DeZuniga) re-vamping SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL.

The Starlin-drawn issues of HULK are to be ≠s 221 & 222, inked by Alfredo Alcala.

Len Wein is taking over DETECTIVE with ≠477, when the Steve Englehart scripts run out. He intends to revive Signalman, Scarecrow, Tweedledee & Tweedledum, the Gentleman Ghost, Clayface III, and the Catwoman. He's also scripting an ECLIPSO two-parter for the back of ADVENTURE (Joe Orlando will pencil it), starting in ≠457, and a HUMAN TARGET series.

ADVENTURE COMICS will become the sixth regular DC Dollar Comic some time in 1978.

DC is adopting a new format, with 25 pages of new story. This will mean a lot of new back-up features, such as in the back of GL the Golden Age Green Lantern.

SUPERMAN VERSUS MUHAMMAD ALI has been delayed again. SUPER-TEAM FAMILY ends with ≠15, teaming Flash and the New Gods.

Jack C. Harris is the new editor for GREEN LANTERN (Julie Schwartz has the new Superman team-up book instead); his first GL script is in ≠104, which sees Mike Grell back on the art once again.

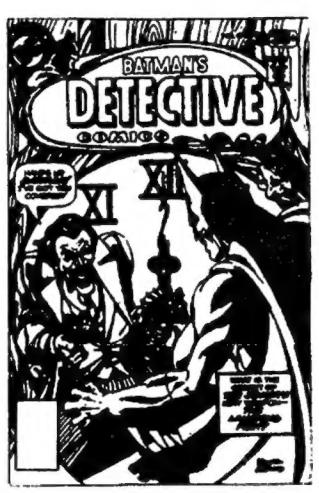
FIRESTORM, by Conway, Milgrom & Janson, edited by Jack C. Harris, is the alter ego of teenager Ronnie Raymond and nuclear scientist Charles Stein--they are merged by an atomic explosion.

Charlton are publishing comics again. Twelve titles have been revived, with on average half new material. These include THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN and THE BIONIC WOMAN, plus seven mystery books.

Gold Key has reacquired the publication rights to the King Features characters. BEETLE BAILEY and POPEYE are scheduled--the futures of THE PHANTOM and HAGAR are less definite.

Replacing GOLD KEY SPOTLIGHT and SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON on the adventure portion of Gold Key's schedule is a new 52-page title, GOLD KEY CHAMPION, with 23 pages of new story and 16 pages of reprints. ≠1 will feature SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON, then comes MIGHTY SAMSON -- and can DAGAR, DR SPEKTOR, and MAGNUS be far behind? All Gold Key titles are now bimonthly at least --STAR TREK appears 8 times a year, and will go to an all-new 52 pages when the new TV series debuts in May or June. Gold Key are also experimenting with a 64-page (no ads) $1.00 comic; WALT DISNEY SHOWCASE ≠44 will be the first.

Warren's new SF magazine has 80 pages, including some interior colour--the cover of the first issue is by Rich Corben.



A new bi-monthly colour Dollar Comic, edited by Roy Thomas, is being planned--the lead feature is TALES OF ASGARD, with "WEIRD WORLD" by Moench & Sutton and a HERCULES series among the back-up strips.

Dave Kraft is the latest black & white line editor; a horror title will replace RAMPAGING HULK on the schedule. Moench & Alcazar are doing a Moon Knight-Brother Voodoo team-up for him, while the shelved Don MacGregor/Tom Sutton "Dragonshade" 30-page kung fu strip could appear in an upcoming MARVEL PREVIEW. Dave Kraft is also planning a Kiss-format $1.50 mag on the Beatles, up until they break up, with art by Perez & Janson. The MARVEL CLASSICS series is now on a quarterly schedule.

1978 Annuals scheduled are (May) TWO IN ONE and FF (both scripted by Roger Slifer), (June) JOHN CARTER and THOR (both by Roy Thomas) plus SPIDER-MAN, (July) TEAM-UP (Claremont), AVENGERS, and HULK (Stern & Byrne). Roy Thomas concludes the series in August with CONAN and TARZAN. The two ERB annuals will feature a crossover tale, with Tarzan joining John Carter on Mars.

The new Kirby books are MACHINE MAN, featuring "Mister Machine", and cavemen and dinosaurs in DEVIL DINOSAUR.

Mike Zeck is the new POWER MAN/IRON FIST penciller. Dan Adkins is drawing a DOCTOR STRANGE fill-in, scripted by Roger Stern, co-starring Sub-Mariner. SPIDER-WOMAN ≠1 is by Wolfman, Infantino & DeZuniga. Pat Broderick's the new CAPT MARVEL artist.

The ALL STAR SPECIAL is replaced on the schedule by a SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE SPECIAL. The 60c SECRET ORIGINS one-shot planned is to feature BLACK CANARY (by Conway & Vosburg), DOCTOR FATE (by Levitz & Staton), and LIGHTRAY (by Conway again, and Don Newton).

Wally Wood has returned to DC; look out for his inks in WORLD'S FINEST ≠251, over Ric Estrada's Wonder Woman pencils. Murphy Anderson also is back--after inking Jimmy Olsen in SUPERMAN FAMILY ≠189, he goes on to ink the HAWKMAN issues of SHOWCASE.

STEEL, THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN is Hank Haywood, a World War II Marine paralysed in a Nazi raid. With new steel bones, his muscles chemically regenerated, and power packs in his joints and lungs, he sounds weird--I wonder what Conway, Heck & Giella are trying to do?

Steve Ditko and Roger McKenzie are said to be busy creating new characters for DC. Johnny Craig is producing DOORWAY INTO NIGHTMARE. Gerry Conway is dreaming up a new superhero, as usual. BAT LASH is to guest-star in WEIRD WESTERN ≠s 45 & 46. Mike Kaluta has drawn the cover for the first Dollar Comic issue of BATMAN FAMILY, ≠17. The FLASH SPECTACULAR being written by Cary Bates will feature Flash, Earth-Two's Flash, and Kid Flash in separate chapters of a book-length adventure. Jim Starlin's drawing a book-length story for SUPERBOY STARRING THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, due to appear shortly.

IPC have cancelled ACTION -- after the November 12th issue it is merged into BATTLE PICTURE WEEKLY. Byblos Publications have cancelled TARZAN WEEKLY, replacing it with a 68-page, 30p TARZAN MONTHLY.

The CONAN film project is going ahead, with a screenplay by Ed Sumner and Roy Thomas, based on Ed's original story. The star of "Pumping Iron", Arnold Schwarzenegger, has been signed to play Conan.

Alan Dean Foster, John Meredith Lucas, and Theodore Sturgeon are writing scripts for the new STAR TREK 22-episode series. The two-hour pilot show opens on Earth, with Kirk returning after leave to the Enterprise, which has been renovated by the addition of two cylindrical sections to the stern, plus a redesigned bridge and engine section. Besides Kirk, other returning cast members are Chekov (now Security Chief), Scotty, McCoy, Yeoman Rand (huh?), Sulu, and Dr Chapel. Add a new Vulcan Science Officer, a new female navigator, and a new first officer, and let's hope for another successful five-year mission!

Returning to DC, Jenette Kahn says that "Larry Hama's got a pilot going that's as wonderfully lunatic as HOWARD THE DUCK." The mind boggles. And on that note, time for acknowledgements--thanks for much of the above to Rich Morrissey, Main News, and Colin Campbell--FANTASY ADVERTISER 63 is available from him at 45p from 'Biytoo', Plains Rd, Gt Totham, Maldon, Essex. -ML

CAPTAIN FROG

LAST ISSUE WE LEFT OUR HERO HELPLESSY HURTLING BACK THROUGH TIME TO THE DAYS BEFORE FRANCE BECAME A SUPERPOWER!

SUDDENLY... SACRÉ BLEU! WHERE HAVE I LANDED?

LOOK PAIRABOLIX! THE SAVIOUR THE GODS PROMISED US HAS FALLEN FROM THE SKIES!

WHO ARE YOU, STRANGELY -DRESSED ONES?

WE ARE GALLINGS LIKE YOURSELF.

I AM ASTEROID THE GALLING WARRIOR SON OF HAEMORRHOID THE APPALLING! AND THIS IS MY CUDDLY COHORT... PAIRABOLIX!

WE HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY THE ROMANS AND IMPRISONED HERE ON THE ACCURSED ISLE OF ALBION!

STRANDED THUS I AM UNABLE TO OBTAIN FRESH SUPPLIES OF THE MAGIC POTION BREWED BY THE WIZARD ALCOHOLIX!

THAT IS WHY WE SUPPLICATED THE SPIRITS OF THE REALM TO SEND FORTH A CHAMPION SUCH AS YOURSELF! UNLESS WE RETURN TO FRANCE WITHIN A WEEK GALL WILL FALL!

HEY! DISA SOUNDS LIKA TREACHERY AFOOT! I WILLA LASH DEM WITH 20 STRANDS OF SPAGHETT! DIS TIME!

MAMA MIA!

I MUSTA REPORTA DIS TO QUEEN BODICE IMMEDIATELY!

'ERE YOU BLEEDIN LITTLE WOP! WOT'S YOUR GAME?! ER-I MEAN WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS INTRUSION OF MY PRIVY?

A MCLXVIII PARDONS YOUR MAJESTY! BUT THE P-P-P-PRISONERS ARE...

FOLLOW ME YOU CRINGING EYETIE!

SSSH! SOMEONE'S COMING!

KRASH!

SEVERAL HOURS LATER...

WELL, WE'VE BEEN MOVED TO ANOTHER CELL BUT WE'RE STILL TRAPPED.

MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST... WHA!

CREAK!

AHAH MES AMIS! A SECRET PASSAGE-WAY!

BOLDLY ASTEROID LEADS THE WAY THROUGH THE WINDING NARROW TUNNEL

UNTIL...

OH NO!

WE'VE ENTERED THE ARENA OF DEATH!

AND THERE... CAESAR!

BUT SHE'S RATHER HEAVILY GUARDED!

NOT 'SEIZE 'ER' YOU FOOL... CAESAR! RASTUS AUGUSTUS...

BLACK CAESAR!

LAWD HAVE MERCY!

NEXT ISH
DREADLOCKS
THE DEMOLISHER!

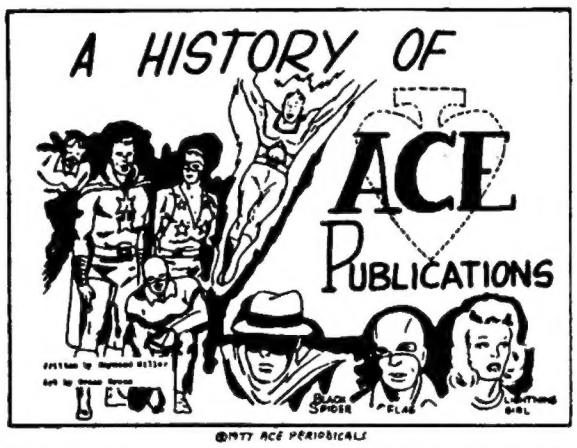
MADE IN AMERICA

HOWARD P. SIEGEL

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN FANDOM

HOW IT BEGAN, MATURED, AND BECAME THE SOURCE FOR MOST OF TODAY'S PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS AND WRITERS.

Do not despair, my British colleagues, if the pictures accompanying this column seem somewhat strange. They are as much an enigma to the new generation of American fans as they are to you. They illustrate the fanzine of 1963--and they tell much.



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Modern (the word is important, in that it limits the topic to the organising years, the most productive era of activity) fandom had begun but a few years before, with what could justly be titled "The Period of Discovery". Collectors were a lonely group, not knowing that others like themselves existed. Perhaps as pre-teenagers they had joined the SUPERMEN OF AMERICA, or CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SENTINELS OF LIBERTY, during World War II, then put away their collections in storage, and reawakened their interest years later. Then the comic book publishers began to install letter columns in their magazines, and avid fans learned of each other, communicated, and started correspondence clubs, which grew larger and larger. Next came mimeographed pages, each the contribution of a member, stapled together by a voluntary committee and mailed to the roster -- APAs, which still exist today, albeit published by and for a select few. Nevertheless, they gave impetus to offset printed fanzines, which soon appeared, profuse with illustrations and available to anyone via the mails.

In such fanzines, luminaries such as Roy Thomas, E. Nelson Bridwell and Len Wein first came to prominence, followed by Marv Wolfman and Paul Levitz. They in turn witnessed the graduations of Marty Pasko, Don Newton, Rich Buckler and Roger Stern into the pro ranks -- and they all received their apprenticeship in writing or drawing for their own, or someone else's, fanzine. If these fanzines hadn't developed, fandom as we know it wouldn't have come into being; and without fanzines and fandom, the profession would be thin ranked indeed.

Names strange to most of you dominated the early sixties. ALTER EGO, ROCKET'S BLAST, COMICOLLECTOR (the latter two would combine later to become the oldest regularly published fanzine in the world), COMIC READER, ON THE DRAWING BOARD. Just a few of perhaps three dozen decently done zines that catered to the rediscovery of the "Golden Age of Comics". With a great deal of gusto, those with informal talent searched their collections for lengthy runs, studied each issue, and prepared two or three page articles about the major publishers of the 40s -- or their stars. National, Fawcett, Timely/Atlas (father of today's Marvel Comics Group), Quality, Ace, Fiction House, Nedor, & MLJ received examination. And, since low circulations made most editors work within a tight budget, most of the illustrations were drawn by the more talented amateurs -- by the late sixties, you could tell quickly which would qualify for the professional ranks by their progress with 00 brush and Rapidograph pen.

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By the middle of the decade, the embryo of the Comic Art Convention had begun to develop. The first efforts were more like meetings than formal presentations; local in scope, with attendance a few hundred at best, and lasting no more than two days, they gave the fan a chance to meet the pros. In New York, where publishers headquarter themselves, the 1964 Con was held at a hotel long since demolished. The Guests of Honour were Gardner Fox (a neighbour of mine) and Otto Binder, while the costume contest featured likenesses of the original Captain Marvel, Harvey's Man In Black Called Fate, ACG's Herbie the Fat Fury, Marvel's Dr Strange, and other heroes no longer in print and just names to you. The panel discussion covered Marvel's rather dynamic approach to marketing and character development. Dealer's tables were limited in what they had to offer, but prices were bargain basement, compared to today's rather ridiculous tags; it was too early for the Frazetta and Neal Adams cults to develop. Toys and novelties were considered to be illogical complements, even though they bore pictures of comic book and newspaper strip characters. These early conventions were run by purists for panelologists, and not meant to be commercially overbearing or expensive to go to. In a future issue I hope to elaborate more on the Comic Art Convention, and its progress towards the destruction of its original purpose.

By 1966, known to many as the year that Batman came to American TV (and thereby changed the scope of many things within the hobby), the fans from other English-speaking countries began to get published in American zines. From South Africa came KOMIX, from Australia John Ryan wrote "Bidgee" (Aboriginal for "The Wind That Tells") -- and American fans learned of a vast category of original Australian cartoon art. Contributions from English fans began to see print, and it became apparent that the United States could no longer hold an exclusive. DC reprints to your shores of many variations became commonplace. Great Britain, like Canada at the end of World War II, was now privy to our latest wares, and readers were fed seeds which would logically develop into the flowering of a British comics fandom.

How does fandom differ between our two countries? For one thing, you've skipped several generations into today. Except for a small percentage, your interests are in modern American comic magazines. Your tastes may not take to the semi-hack art and rote plots of the 1955 to 1965 period, while comparisons of three super heroes who could stretch their bodies into elongated and grotesque shapes, which may once have been a juicy subject for the early American panelologist, might not be your cup of tea. A quiz asking for the names of 30 heroes who wore stars on their costumes may seem silly now, but was in vogue then. The newness of old things, the nostalgia boom, the awe-inspiring realization that there were others like you, all made for an Alice in Wonderland feeling. But since those early 60s, the reader has matured, has been weened on sophisticated art and stories catering to realization and actual social values. You were, in essence, born into comic collecting and panelology already toilet trained -- you are no different from our latest generation of fans.

Where will fandom go from here? The major publishers will dictate that. Here in profusion are revivals of characters from the 40s, in slightly different dress or bearing new powers. Hardcover books catering to the history of cartoon art, the comicbook in particular, are appearing frequently. We are in the midst of a boom in merchandising that has the earmarks of exceeding the Batmania cycle. No person, young or old, can avoid facing something with a comics character on it. Some will prove, by market research, to be more popular than others, and we will see once again the demise of many superheroes. As prices continue to rise, the average fan will be forced, if he isn't already, to cut down on the number of titles he reads each month. The result will be lower and lower sales, less and less of a product line--and consequently the scope by which fandom, yours and ours, will live will be subject to drastic limits. It's likely we will all revert to earlier days for our comics reading--take it from one who has gone that route before that you'll enjoy the experience.

-HOWARD SIEGEL

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I,000'S OF MARVEL'S, D.C'S, WARREN'S, ETC, ETC, ETC, FOR SALE TO YOU NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!

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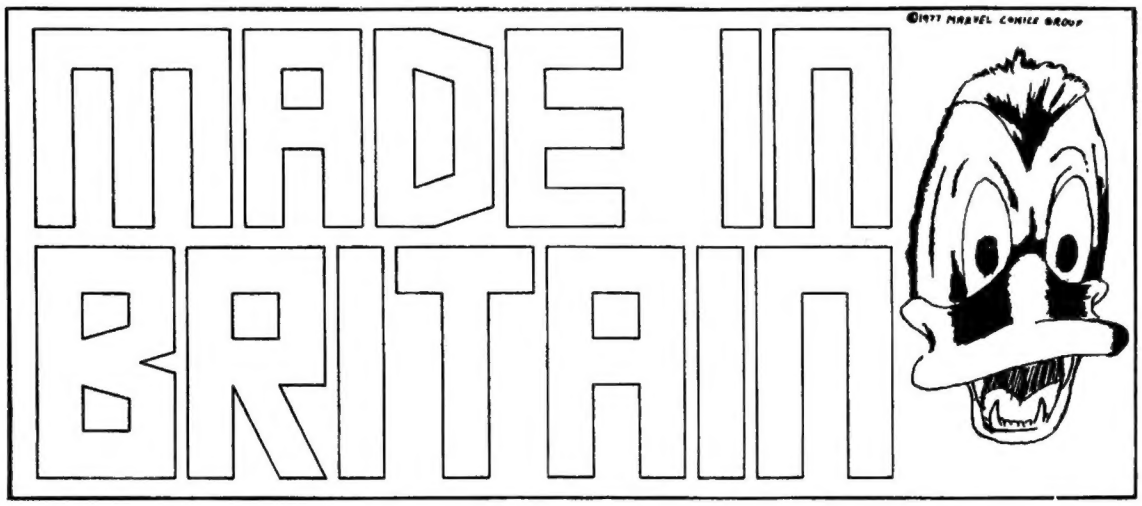


It's astonishing how many annuals are published in Britain, from "Angling Mail" to "Bunty" -- there must be a hundred of them! I've limited myself to a dozen of the more interesting ones, which set me back £13.45 (ouch!), which I'll proceed now to describe to you. After all, they are supposed to be Christmas annuals, so you should still be able to find them.

The cheapest, thanks to its paperback format, is LION (85p, 128pp), with three Adam Eterno adventures (27 pages in all), the origin of a war group called Sergeants Four, and 8-pagers featuring a magician & alchemist called Spellbinder, the light-hearted "Last of the Harkers", and Robot Archie. Add Paddy Payne, Zip Nolan, Cliff Hanger, Steel Commando, and Carson's Cubs, and you've plenty of reprint reading.

MIGHTY TV COMIC (£1.20, 64pp, half in colour and half in two colours) is rather lower in the value stakes. Among the many comical one or two page strips, however, is the 5-page Star Trek adventure "The Gods Have Come" (a 1969 reprint from a British comic, rather more interesting than the reprints of two very recent Gold Key comics in the new STAR TREK ANNUAL), along with Dr Who in "Jackals of Space", a new 5-pager also in colour, and a text Dr Who story, "Master of the Black Hole".

There are lots of Marvel annuals around as usual--but at £1.35 for 64 pages, I've not bought any. Maybe when they turn up next January at half price? There are, for the record, annuals for the Titans (if anybody remembers that comic--it died last November), Mighty World, Avengers, Spider-Man, the late Captain Britain, and Hulk. I have bought the DC Annual, which is, as usual, SUPERMAN & BATMAN (£1.25, 64pp, half in colour and half in only two colours). The Batman 20-pager (the first 7 in black, red and white only) is from BATMAN ≠260, while the Superman 25-pager (the last 6 in black, yellow & white) is from ACTION ≠449 -- but it's the original British extras that appeal here. A 4-page Superman text tale is illustrated rather hurriedly by J. Britton, but both 3-page Batman text stories are illustrated by John Bolton, who also brightens up a pair of quizzes and the opening two pages. He draws an excellent Batman -- and Hawkman and Batgirl are looking good, too!

PLANET OF THE APES, TARZAN, and THE NEW AVENGERS are all, like Supes/Bats, put out by Brown Watson, and share the same price and page-count. PotA has three 6-page comics stories, one in colour, all beautifully drawn by the aforementioned Mr Bolton, who also illustrated one of the text tales, and the opening two pages--the rest of the book's made up of photos from the TV series, and the films, a quiz or nine, and text adventures. The 32-page colour midsection in TARZAN reprints an old Gold Key issue, Tarzan ≠202, while the whole of the rest of the annual is devoted to a text adventure, "The Wizard Out Of Time" -- beautifully illustrated by John Bolton, who also did the opening 2 pages and the drawing the cover was based on. And to prove my favourite British artist really has been busy, I can report that Steed, Purdey and Gambit have responded well to his treatment in the last of this group of annuals--besides text illos, he drew both New Avengers comics stories, in colour--"Fangs For the Memory" & "Hypno-Twist". The photo-features are okay too, especially the Joanna Lumley bits.

Brown Watson specialise in TV tie-ins, including FLASH GORDON (full of reprints of Pat Boyette's work from the Charlton comic) and lots of TV cops--however, the only other one of their titles I bought was THE MUPPET SHOW, still £1.25 for 64 pages but in full colour throughout--lots of photos to help you work out which is, say, Dr Teeth and which is Floyd, plus a couple of way-out strips. Any Muppet fan would love it, I'm sure!

A couple of D.C. Thompson annuals I've picked up (95p, 128pp, two colours) are VICTOR and HOTSPUR; they both have a wide variety of strips, including war, soccer, wild west, humour, and adventure, while VICTOR includes "The Tough of the Track", "The Coward of the Fighting 43rd", "Joe Bones", and "Morgyn the Mighty", and HOTSPUR cover-features British superhero "King Cobra", along with air ace "Scarlet Hawk", "The Big Palooka", and "Kenji the Samurai". They're both quite interesting reads -- aimed at a younger audience than Marvel, of course, but a nice varied way of passing an hour, and hardly a space-wasting quiz or text feature in sight.

But, back to the firm we began with, IPC. VALIANT (£1.25, 144pp, including 16 in full colour, 16 with added purple) has a colour 8-pager starring cover-featured tough cop "One-Eyed Jack", and eleven more adventure strips (plus funnies, photos, and text features), including again "Adam Eterno", and the always interesting "Janus Stark", "Steel Claw", and "Kid Pharaoh"; ACTION (£1, 144pp, 16 in colour and 16 with added red) is a better bargain, with a better ratio of new material to reprint strips. Present of course are "Hook Jaw", "Dredger", "Hell's Highway", "Look Out For Lefty", "Double Dynamite", and, as a text tale only, "Hellman", while among the old-timers are "Rory MacDuff", "Nero Cortez, Emperor of Crime", and a full 28 pages of adventure in and around a weird castle, "Flying Fortress". Full marks for variety and value, except that almost a quarter of the book's given over to text and photo-features.

2000 A.D. (£1 for 128pp, 16 in colour and 16 with added orange) suffers from a plodding cover less exciting than any the weekly comic has printed, but does lead off with a new Dan Dare colour 10-pager, along with two "MACH 1" and "Judge Dredd" stories, while the "Harlem Heroes", Bill Savage of "Invasion", "Shako", and even Reagan and Carver of "Flesh" put in their appearances--and don't forget kindly old Tharg's fine "Future Shocks", including one drawn by Kev O'Neill. As far as I can tell, there's only one reprint in the package, a group called "The Smith Family" -- mainly notable for, at least on some copies, the too-visible sellotape used to stick the sheets down! 17 pages of text isn't excessive, I suppose. Is "The Dream Machine" drawn by Belardinelli? I wish IPC would include credits -- but if you're only buying one annual this year, if you'll take my advice this is the one.

Now that I've briskly cantered through the main topic with space to spare, I'd like to deal with a few topics that have been raised lately. First of all, I do intend to deal with all types of British comic eventually, including the multitude of funny comics -- though I can't say I'm looking forward to the trip to buy a load of those titles aimed at pre-pubescent girls! What coverage I give in future to British undergrounds is outside my control at the moment; it depends whether or not Al Matheson gets his act together, if he isn't able to take over "Comix Comments" on a regular basis then first reviewing rights on BRAINSTORM and company revert to me. Also, may I say that, while I do enjoy and appreciate a fair number of the British comics produced, from HOUSE OF HAMMER to BULLET to the reprints of FAT FREDDY'S CAT, I am still a great fan of American comics too, be they underground, overground, or ground * level, so please don't try and make me out to be solely a fan of one particular type of comics.

As a matter of record, I'd better give a brief mention to the two new UK Marvel weeklies. THE COMPLETE FANTASTIC FOUR is reprinting "full-length" FF stories (1 reprints FF ≠133), and re-reprinting their earliest sagas; moving them out of SUPER SPIDER-MAN makes room for Thor to return. RAMPAGE has long Defenders tales, with half a Nova instalment in the back. And on a monthly schedule is SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN -- but more on that next time. And poor old Captain Britain's strip ends in Super Spider-Man ≠247, just over a year after his debut. I'd have thought Marvel could have done a lot better--I hope they try again, some time. -RUAN LANIHORNE

reaction

Dear Martin,

Well, another Bem, another Bemloc from yours truly--but BEM-15? Still, a change is as good as a rest, and who should know more about arrests than your assistant editor emeritus? I'm not surprised the local sheep are worried--or has his, ahem, relationship with Maureen James put an end to all that kind of thing?

Interesting illo by Chris Ash on page 7... wonder if Ms Glancy approved? This magazine of yours is including more and more explicit art and writing with each issue. Keep up the good work.

As to the question raised this issue in 'Katholicity', Tarzan--the ERB version at least -- was indeed a very educated man, intelligent enough to know that his kingdom was a damn sight cleaner and safer than the concrete jungle of city life. The celluloid 'Me Tarzan, You Jane' image is bull, and I just hope Marvel realise this and keep to the original theme. The Jane character is yet another victim of the films. Why shouldn't she be shown as an efficient killer, fully adapted to jungle life? Maybe the Women's Circle would not approve. There certainly was a commotion in the thirties when some puritan realised that the two were living in sin (even if one of the early non-Universal movies did feature a rather farcical 'marriage'). If the sight of Clark Gable's bare chest in 'It Happened One Night' could persuade thousands of male film-goers not to wear vests, then what would happen if couples began to follow Tarzan and Jane's unwed example? Hmmm...

So, a new look for Howard the D. Well, it was to be expected once the comic hit double figures. Nobody would have wanted the cost of a law suit (like Superman and Captain Marvel), so a quiet word by the Disney Organisation to Marvel probably did the trick. From a bystander's view, it's correct. Howard is not Donald, so why should he look like him? Of course, fanzine artists who've got the knack of drawing Howard Mark I will be a bit put out having to learn a new style, but that is the way the cookie crumbles...

Re: ASTRON. Well, my partner-in-crime Chris Cutts and myself are now on the last stages of planning, and issue one should be out in time for the (SF) Novacon. SF and comic contributions are welcomed, but no art at present. Send me an s.a.s.e. for more details.

Lastly, the newest -- and best -- name-dropping column of all time, REALITY PLUS (modesty ill becomes it). Societies, Marts and Conventions, Established zines, New zines--all can get mentioned, and sample copies of zines will be reviewed fairly.

-Steven J. Green.

Bem getting more explicit? Well, don't blame Ms Glancy, that cartoon on her page was solely the work of Mr Chris K. Ash!

Dear Martin,

Does anyone know K. Williams' first name? For some reason, I'm sure that she is female, and for some other reason I've got a feeling the 'K' stands for Kate, but I think that's just because there's an actress going by that name--at least, I think there's an actress called Kate Williams.

Are there any answers forthcoming from the dark halls of BEM? I assume that you realise those letters can stand for Bug Eyed Monster, was it intentional?

-Evan Morton, Bearsden

It was indeed intentional, Evan! Or how about Better Entertainment Magazine? As for K. Williams, just don't start reading any continued stories, you may be on the receiving end of such a thump from a well-aimed hand-bag very shortly...

Dear Martin,

What's this you say about cutting down on cover repros? Don't! If I'm not exposed to at least a dozen a month my hands start to shake and I go cold turkey. You don't want to be responsible for the withdrawal of a main-liner cover repro addict do you?

Keith Williams, I felt, hit upon the main hitch in dollar comics in his column --having to buy a comic with one feature you want and two or three you don't has bothered me. I can't criticise you on your unfashionable views, Keith. After all I... (pause to compose myself) don't exactly... well, don't really like Howard the Duck much. (Pause for stony silence.) You wouldn't print my full address would you Mart ol' pal? Please?

So the "would you read comics in public" debate carries on. Well, I wouldn't. Not because I don't have sufficient nerve (he hastened to add), but because deep down I prefer the comic's underground sub-culture nature. Don't you get a kind of perverse thrill out of facing the incredulous looks of the shop assistants as you pay for your Thors and Defenders, and thinking "What're you looking at, morons? This is an art form"? (You Marvel and DC only specialists have it easy. It takes more guts to walk bold-faced up to the counter with a copy of Yogi Bear or Flintstones.)

-Phil Emery.

Ah, but Marvel completists have to buy those two titles, along with Scooby-Doo and Dynomutt, now! Luckily, only from the specialist shops, at 35p a throw (or a little cheaper at Marts)--fellow addicts are much more understanding...

Dear Martin,

I'm sorry to disagree with your end of letter comment, but I never disagreed with the fact that DC etc need money to survive... and I've nothing against the commercial issues, such as Spidey versus Supes...but I don't really think they need a fan's advice on how to be commercial. It's a bit like trying to sell Moses a book of prayer instruction, or enrolling Namor McKenzie in a deep sea diving course.

What I mean is that a strip such as Omega could have been better if it had been designed from the start to end in ten issues. More people might have bought the damn thing if they'd known the mystery was to be resolved in ten issues, and we wouldn't have had to put up with the sometimes idiotic padding (such as Nitro) --who knows, it could have been another "Rich Man Poor Man".

I think you've got a good competition format in Katholicity; the best explanation for Jor-El's hair change wins a free trip to Superman's Fortress of Solitude, situated in the Hollywood Hills. I can see it now:

"Now in WORLD OF KRYPTON... learn the devastating story of the lab accident that turned Jor-El's hair to bottle blonde!

"Now in WORLD OF KRYPTON see Jor-El's amazing new power. Passing through a time and space warp, the Grand Master lands on Krypton, and bestows the powers of Nighthawk upon Jor-El, including mental control over his hair colour!"

LARA: "Jor-El, what do you mean? You've been married before?"

JOR-EL: "Correct, wife. I am in fact an escaped criminal, and had dyed my hair from blonde to black in order to evade the lawman tracking me!"

LARA: "But why are you letting your hair go blonde now, Jor-El?"

JOR-EL: "I have been proven innocent, Lara. Lieutenant Gerard has finally caught up with that one-armed murderer!"

LARA: "Gee... All this time I've been married to Deadman, and I never guessed."

-Graeme Bassett, Grimsby

Golly, I love a happy ending--I think...

Dear Martin,

Much thanx for Bem-15; the new cover logo is great, I hope you keep it. The interior of Bem was as good as, if not better than, previous issues.

Maybe you could have an extra page (or two?) devoted to fanzines and undergrounds -- I've no complaints about Fan-Things, it's just that I'm sure there are more zines on the market than Ed mentions.

Mike Matthews, Tommy Sheridan and I are publishing NAPALM KISS, an underground full of strips and art with a *colour* cover. I'll send a copy when it's printed, perhaps you could mention it in Bem-16?

Oh yeah, I've included a couple of illos which maybe you could use -- those others you've been using were done about eighteen months ago. Perhaps they will give you an idea of what I'm doing nowadays.

-Steve Gibson.

Thanks, Steve -- but can I make a general plea to artists not to draw on cardboard? It bends permanently in the post, and is difficult to use without leaving a ragged outline when printed. Use ordinary white paper, reinforced for posting if you wish with a separate sheet of cardboard, and we'll all be happy!

Dear Martin,

Thanks for the latest ish, Bem-15; the new title logo is great, although I did prefer the logo on #11--perhaps you could combine the two? Your strongest features are Rich Morrissey's America, Sigh, and Made In Britain, they all ensure that I will renew my subscription when the need arises. I would love to see a regular 'Highgate Six' feature, say 2 pages every other issue? Think about it. As well as being funny, 'The Highgate Six' raise some interesting topics.

Could you please tell me how you ever got mixed up in the crazy mess we call Fandom? Please, huh?

'Til Howard 'comes foul (yerk!),
Make Mine Bemusing!

-Mark Finch.

Hmm... Doesn't have much of a ring about it, that valedictory venture. How about "Better Buy Bem"? I came into fandom by writing letters of comment in the first place, so everyone round here is on the right tack!

Dear Martin,

I have stopped buying US Marvel comics, except Howard the Duck and the odd issue that catches my eye -- I will continue to buy the British weekly comics though!

By the way, has anybody got Spider-Man Comics Weekly 1-149, MWOM 1-173, Avengers 1-119, PotA 1-90, Dracula Lives 1-87, and Conan 1-18? Please let me know what copies you have, and the price (including cost of postage) you want, and I'll write to you if I'm interested.

Bem has improved immensely over the past few issues, and I hope it will continue doing so in the future.

Do you still give free copies of Bem to letter writers?

-Stephen Bailey, "Sonley", Town End Lane, Swinscoe, nr Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 2HS

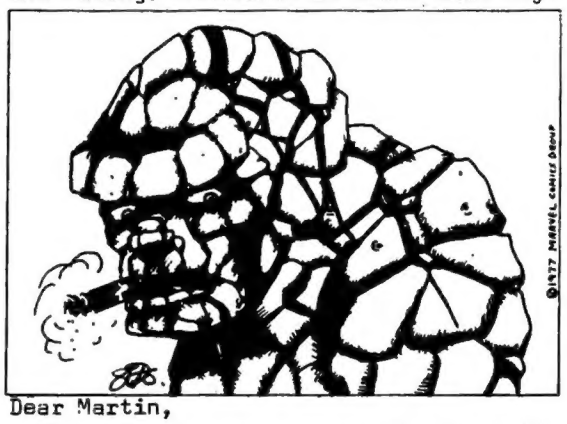
Even when a letter's a cunningly disguised wants ad, Stephen, as long as it actually sees print -- which means you are paid up to Bem-22, now! Just one more reason why I'll never get rich...

Dear Martin,

Congratulations on being voted number one Fan Personality, from all the zines I've seen your work in you certainly deserve it. How do you find time to do anything else?

-Terry Moore, Birmingham

Who said I do have time for anything else, other than sleeping, working, breathing, and eating? Sometimes it seems that way!



Dear Martin,

It's nice to see someone finally rally to the defence of colour comic books "as we know them" as K. Williams did in this issue's "Sigh" -- but I can't agree with his criticism of the Dollar Comics.

As for the undergrounds, the few that I've bothered to waste my money on have been merely expensive trash.

Continuing to the rest of Bem-15, Rich Morrissey obviously has no worries about fan APAthy (sorry). I feel I must credit Kathleen Glancy for fitting so little into one page, and Ed Sallis for fitting so much. Also, many thanks to Ruan Lanihorne for the list of Asterix books, it enabled me to put names to the holes in my collection. I too have purchased "Les 12 Travaux D'Asterix"--20 francs (£2.40) is a heck of a lot considering I can't read French, but I reckon it's worth twice the price.

All the three strips in this issue were good, but -- "Asteroid the Galling"?

Is nothing sacred?

-Jonathan Rogers.

Dear Martin,

I noticed from Bem-15 and a few other zines that American comics are getting more and more slagged, and British comics more and more praised--quite rightly so.

When I was about five, I got all the kiddie comics, such as Beano, and then I came across my first American comic, an old JLA. I got it because it had Batman in it, and I enjoyed Bats on TV--I didn't know he had his own magazine!

Well, this progressed until I was buying about four or five American comics, DC and Marvel, a week--but then the BRITISH MARVELS came along. Like so many others, I was completely changed to an all-Marvel collector, and hated DC. However, after a couple of years I dared to buy some DCs again. I wasn't very impressed.

In fact, the only U.S. comics I really collect are WARLORD, GL/GA, and the late OMEGA. This is because of the British magazines -- I get HOUSE OF HAMMER, which is absolutely superb (especially John Bolton's art), 2000 AD, and a few others not as regularly. The art in all these mags is very good, better than most of the American comics, but being in black & white helps. The message is that British, and black & white, is best!

-Phil Hartley, Denton

Dear Martin,

Well now, Bem-15 was a very nice issue. Rich Morrissey's page was interesting--I wonder if anyone out there would like to join an APA, it certainly sounds like a good idea.

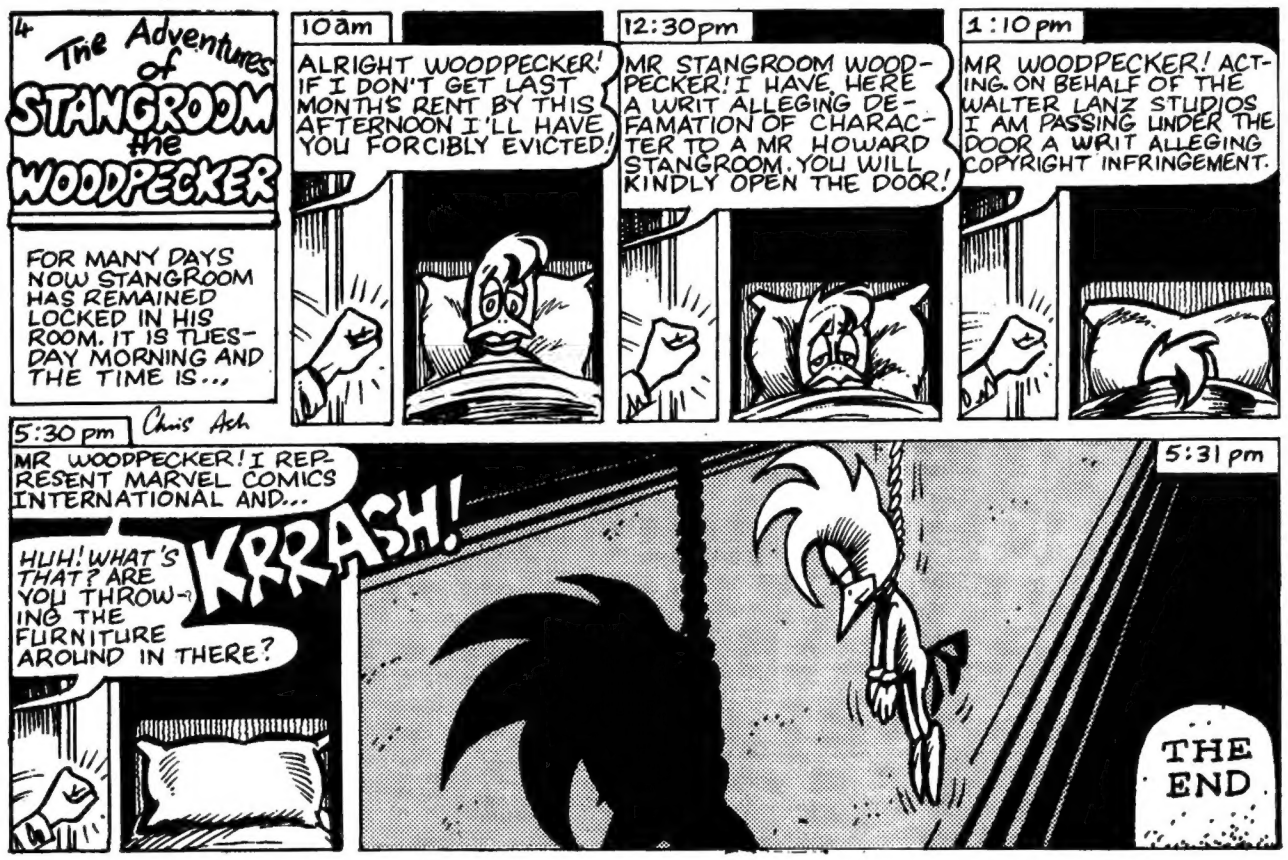
Katholicity was good, but a Tarzan that could teach himself to read and write sounds absurd. Reaction was the best part of the zine, and always will be, but Sigh seemed a bit boring. However, at first I thought that of Katholicity, and now she has got me hooked.

Made in Britain was up to its usual standard, but Ruan Lanihorne seems to think that IPC are the only source of British comix. I may not be old enough to (legally) buy undergrounds, but at least let me read about them.

Fan-Things was brilliant as always, but surely 2 pages could be spared for it--maybe, as Joe Matthews suggested, the Review Section could be cut by a page to give it the room. Tale-Enders is still great, and the art this time around was good--artists of note were Wick Neocleous, Martin Dutton, Chris Ash (his uncensored cartoon), and Phil Elliott.

-Martin Noone.

Made in Britain doesn't cover underground comics, because Bem is supposed to have a separate column devoted to them. Due, I expect, to his new job at D.C. Thompson, Al Matheson did not come through with it last time--but then, his predecessor was fairly unpredictable, too! The review section certainly has got a little predictable of late, but rather than double Ed's work load (the longest column in UK comics zines?), what I've done is to broaden the scope of the review section not just to comics related books and British comics, but to fanzines as well.


4
The Adventures of STANGROOM the WOODPECKER
FOR MANY DAYS NOW STANGROOM HAS REMAINED LOCKED IN HIS ROOM. IT IS TUESDAY MORNING AND THE TIME IS...
10am
ALRIGHT WOODPECKER! IF I DON'T GET LAST MONTH'S RENT BY THIS AFTERNOON I'LL HAVE YOU FORCIBLY EVICTED!
12:30pm
MR STANGROOM WOODPECKER! I HAVE HERE A WRIT ALLEGING DEFAMATION OF CHARACTER TO A MR HOWARD STANGROOM. YOU WILL KINDLY OPEN THE DOOR!
1:10pm
MR WOODPECKER! ACTING ON BEHALF OF THE WALTER LANZ STUDIOS I AM PASSING UNDER THE DOOR A WRIT ALLEGING COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT.
5:30pm
Chris Ash
MR WOODPECKER! I REPRESENT MARVEL COMICS INTERNATIONAL AND...
HUH! WHAT'S THAT? ARE YOU THROWING THE FURNITURE AROUND IN THERE?
KRRASH!
5:31pm
THE END

Dear Martin,

Despite the cover (ugh!), the Review Section, Rich Morrissey's USA, and Made In Britain, Bem-15 was on par. What caught my eye was the Invisi-- er, Katholicity. Kathleen Glancy has a great way of disguising a review as an article. Did you see the size of those-- whoops! Nearly got censored.

How about having a translation of Rich Morrissey's column next time?

Would you mind giving me the address of that silly person who hopes I'm seeing my psychiatrist? I'll get the Black Wi--er, Kathleen G to go round and...sort him out.

Where's Herman? Bring him back if he hasn't already gone, I like him. I also think 'Thundermole' will reach the top, he's great.

I'm not so keen on 'Stangroom'--there's only one Woodpecker for this zine, and that's the one and only HERMAN!

-Roger McBroom.

Ms K. Glancy wishes to say that enough is enough. I might, just possibly, dress up as the Black Angel, the Black Canary, or the Black Cat; one never knows what mental aberrations might visit one. But not, not ever, the Black Widow. I do not like the Black Widow. Especially not when the silly bitch is going to go crawling back to the incredibly fickle and shallow Daredevil, thereby destroying what little credibility both characters have. Is that clear? The next one to connect me with BW gets a visit from Captain Scotnat and his caber. -KG

Dear Martin,

Since Bem became a bigger zine it has improved with each issue, and now I can honestly say it is my favourite fanzine. With many fanzines, although they are mostly interesting and informative, there are certain parts which are more boring and lifeless than a concrete slab -- Bem, however, doesn't have these parts. What it does have is an informal, thought-provoking style, which is very important for such a publication.

The Mike Higgs centrespread was great, and brought back memories of his 'Cloak' days in POW. By the way Ruan, the "Legend Testers" strip appeared in SMASH, during the late sixties, ending when the "Power Comics" of Odhams began merging together.

How about devoting some space in 'Made in Britain' to those old Odhams comics? WHAM, SMASH, and POW were the best British "funny" comics produced in the sixties, and are much superior to today's feeble attempts. The 1960s adventure comics were also much better than the present stuff being put out by IPC--today, good stories and plots are ignored in favour of bloodshed and violence. Even 2000 AD has gone downhill since the advent of "Shako". Come back "Flesh", all is forgiven.

-Lewis W. Stringer.

So tell us all about the power of Power, Lewis -- neither Ruan nor I know Alf and Bart from Sid and Dick! But that's enough on the letters front for this Bem, if the rest of the contents are to be fitted in --but Reaction will be back, at its usual length, next time, providing enough good letters arrive. And remember, metonymous Mike Cruden will be on hand to give out most of the answers (see page 2), so be kind to him--he's a meek, gentle fellow, unused to the hurly-burly of Reaction!

SIGH

(still by K. Williams)

(3) MAJORITY RULES, OK?

Question: Do we, the readers, have any control over the fate of comics?

Answer: Depends who we mean by "we"... is that "we" in the sense of No.6--or of No.1? Or, for the benefit of all those poor tortured souls who haven't seen The Prisoner, let me put it this way: When you consider the above question, do you think of yourself as being a comic reader--just one unit of a sub-culture, so to speak? Because in the answer to that lies not only the answer to the problem, but the problem itself...

Let's take a single individual reader; take me, for instance. (Why me? Because I'm here, that's why!) Now, if I ruled the comics world there'd be plenty of changes I'd like to see made. Like, for instance: bring back Phantom Stranger, War Is Hell, Shadow, Stalker, Omega, the real Black Panther, etc, and get rid of Nova, Human Flea, Ms Marvel, Gawdzilla, Unexpected, Ghosts, G.I. Combat, the Kirby Black Panther, etc... Oh, there are lots of changes I'd like to make, if I were in control.

But of course it doesn't work like that.

Comics aren't produced to suit the whims of publishers; they're a commercial concern, and in order to keep going they have to satisfy their public, the readers.

But I'm a reader, you say, and you are too--are they satisfying us? Which brings us neatly back to the original problem: who is us? (Never mind about the grammar) If "us" is just you and I, two readers, then together we would represent about 0.002% of the readership of an average comic mag. If somehow we managed to get together a whole hundred people of our particular persuasion, which I think you'd agree wouldn't be the easiest of tasks, this would constitute a whacking great 0.1% of said readership--and if we could then get said 100 to agree on what should be done to the given mag to correct the fault we'd detected (again not exactly an easy task), that would still only be the feelings of a fraction of a percent of the readers. Can you imagine a petition to the publishers starting "We the undersigned, being 0.1% of the readership of your mag, feel you should make these changes..."?

But perhaps you take exception to being referred to as a fraction of a percentage? Perhaps you feel that you're an individual not a statistic ("I am not a number, I am a free man!" as someone or other put it) --well, okay, but so are the other 99,999 (give or take) readers who read the comic in question, they all have feelings and views about the mag. Supposing the vast majority of them are happy with the mag the way it is, why should your views, or the views of some small clique, be given precedence? Majority rules, OK?

Ah, you respond, but supposing that they aren't happy; the "silent majority" don't by definition make known their feelings, so how can we know whether or not they're happy with the status quo? Other than by pressing for what we want, and then seeing if there's a backlash against it?

To which I reply, you're looking at it the wrong way round. Maybe the "silent majority" can't communicate directly to you, but they certainly can to the comics publishers, in the most direct way--by buying, or not buying, the magazines. And therein lies the control. To go back to the beginning--yes, we the readers do have control over the fate of comics, in the one way that really counts: sales.

Riddle me this: Why has Kirby been taken off Cap? Fan outcry? Hardly. The letter pages made the position quite clear there. "We feel that most of our readers like Jack's work." But that quote continues, "Whether we're right, only time and sales will tell." Well, time and sales have told.

Riddle me another: Why was the Eternals strip never in the end interwoven into the 'Marvel Universe'? Because fans protested it couldn't possibly work? Again, hardly. The lettercols were quite specific on the point: if there was reader demand for it, then all considerations of continuity and credibility would go by the board. But, fortunately, reader demand wasn't great, either for the interweaving, or the mag itself, once the novelty had worn off.

And so it goes.

When I first started this col, a couple of issues back, it was in a slightly despairing frame of mind. The attitude I found expressed in the armadillos' replies in the lettercols of Cap and other Marvel (and DC) magazines was that the majority of readers were quite undiscriminating, and unconcerned with such things as continuity and consistency, so long as they were given a "ripping yarn", to borrow a phrase. But the subsequent removal of Kirby from Cap, and other similar developments (Nova down to bi-monthly, Champs cancelled, etc), prompted me to re-think. Was it possible that the armadillos had got it wrong, and that the "silent majority" were just as discriminating (in their own way) as the "fans"?

Of course there are flaws to this theory --it would hardly explain the continued existence of Ghosts or Unexpected, for instance--but then, there may be special circumstances in particular cases, such as lack of competition. But I think there might be grounds for at least restrained optimism--which is better than despair.

Of course it's a wrench to lose comics like Swamp Thing or Man-Thing, but those mags, and other mourned losses like them, did seem to have lost sight of their starting points. Better perhaps to stop them before they went too far along a wrong road. It's a decision I'm glad I'm not called upon to make -- but then, of course, it's a "majority" decision...

What's that you say? You weren't part of the majority who made those decisions? Well, if you failed to buy the titles in question, you were. And if you did, sorry, but that's just too bad. In an imperfect world, the alternatives are either rule by the majority, or the minority. There's no way to please everybody--and in comicdom, the majority rules...

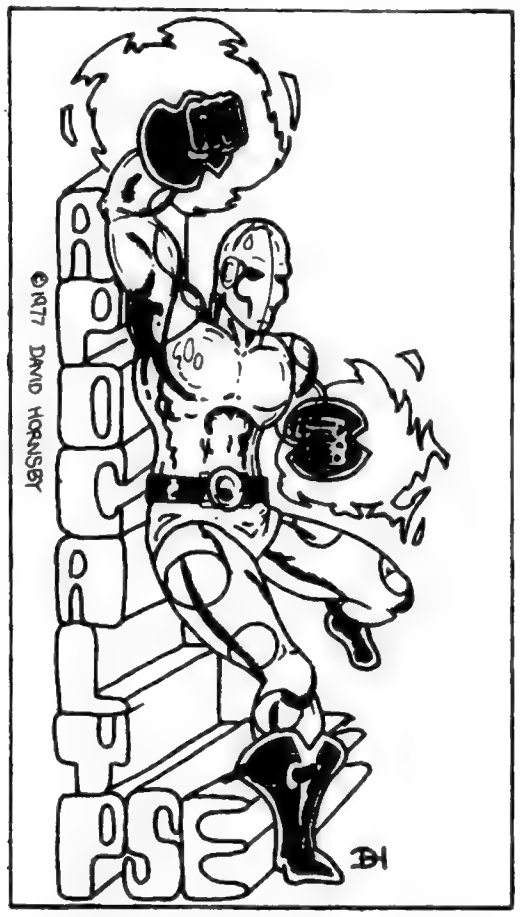
OK?

-K. WILLIAMS

FAN-THINGS

As usual, the question is--where should I start? How about a new single-character stripzine called THE MIGHTY APOCALYPSE, by Dave Hornsby 12 A4 pages for 25p

An original superhero strip, it seems to be developing quite nicely--but Dave could fit a bit more story on a page to give better value for money! One illo is worth 1000 words, so over to you Dave:



I feel that this sort of project deserves our support, so how about it?

George Barnett is vowing to bring out PANELOLOGIST on a quarterly schedule, so ≠9 is probably out about now (see page 14 for order details)--highspots include, so George says, a "beautiful" photo of Our Editor, with Hunter Tremayne being rude about him. Now that's worth 25p! George also wants the "Crackers" evenings given another plug--why not, indeed? If you're within reach of London, the pub with the rather apt name is at the top of Wardour Street, just off Oxford Street, and the comic fan gatherings start right after "Dark They Were & Golden Eyed" closes on the first Friday of each month. It's just a smallish gathering of people with an interest in comics--get George drunk and you'll probably end up with a free copy of Penny, but you can't win 'em all!

GENESIS is the name of a new stripzine that Dave Byrom is getting together--and he's in need of material. So, get in touch with Dave

if you want to contribute. No spot illoes, he says, just strip art samples and scripts -- and please enclose return postage. After all --many an artist started this way...

Coming in December is SUPER ADVENTURE STORIES 50p from Jonny Kurzman.

--it features five new superhero strips,

including some that Dave Edge had worked up for his abortive "All Star Magazine" project. I'll report further on this zine when I see it -- the free-sheet Jonny has done is interesting, but 50p is a lot of money to invest when nobody's even seen the zine. Maybe next time I'll be able to give a full review.

Now that FANTASY TRADER is becoming a subscription-only publication linked with Bem, MEDIA seems to have the adzine field to itself, with the exception of the more expensive, less regular FANTASY ADVERTISER INTERNATIONAL. It's keeping to a monthly schedule, with reasonable ad rates (£1.50 per page) and interesting columns by Phil Hall & Colin Gould, editor Mark Ellis, and the irrepressible (though it's been tried) Graeme Bassett--at 18p an issue, or £1.00 for six 16 A5 pages, from Mark Ellis.

it's well worth subscribing to.

APAs have been mentioned in these pages before--but now at last, inspired by Rich Morrissey's column in Bem-15, somebody is starting one! Phil Greenaway

has, with advise from Martin Lock, announced the following rules. The maximum membership is 20; the number of copies of his zine a member must send in is 22; the zine page size is A4; deadline for the first mailing is January 1, and then every two months; and the minimum activity to retain membership is 12 pages per annum. Besides Martin (who intends to call his apazine "EM"), other fans likely to join include Maureen James, Paul Jay, Garry Selemba, and Rick Catilli, who was to have co-edited MAGUS with Phil, until he put his 'O' levels first. If you want to be a founder member of Britain's first comics apa, get in touch with Phil right away; your only costs will be printing & posting in your own zine, Phil has decided to pay the costs of sending out the packs of zines to members himself.

WORLDS is an unpretentious, lively zine for those whose interest in the fantastic goes beyond comics to include films, TV, and books as well 8 A5 pages for 10p from Mark Finch.

--issue 6 is the first I've seen, and while I admit it won't make CMN shake in its boots, I enjoyed it. For 3p plus postage, what more should I ask?

Last time I mentioned TALES OF TOMORROW, published by the "Mr Tomorrow" bookshop

--and now here's STARAK ≠1, featuring a 20-page story of the best hero from that zine by Mark Starling. Starak deserves to succeed in his own comic, and I hope he does so; if you're in East Anglia, drop in and buy a copy for 15p, and browse through the thousands of comics Lenny Brooker (owner of the shop) has for sale (or send about 25p for a copy by post)--after the recent demise of BOGUS in Hull, the moral is that if you want to keep a local comic shop, you've got to support it!

Oh, while I remember, a Rob Barrow date change--his next Lyndhurst Hall Comicbook Marketplace is now on the 10th December.

I mentioned the first issue last time; ULTIMATE SCIENCE FICTION ≠2 16 pages, A5, for 22p from Neil Bailey & Steve Dillon.

followed a couple of months later, and I expect ≠3 is well on its way; the saga of the Dobering dynasty continues powerfully, Steve Dillon is certainly an artist to watch -- how better than by a £1.32, six-issue subscription to USF?

COMICS UNLIMITED ≠48 flumped through my letterbox the other day 40 pages, A4, for 25p, or 12 for £2, from Alan Austin,

with Baragrin (when's the all-Baragrin comic coming out, Alan?), an appreciation of Don McGregor's Killraven work, articles on Peanuts and the Daleks, a huge letter column, and even a short SF story. CU is one of the top three current fanzines--its frequency more than makes up for the poor reproduction in some places.

Well, next time I hope to have finally a copy of KIDZ STUFF ≠2 to review (see ad elsewhere in Bem--honest!)--okay, Hunter, impress me! And ASTRON ≠1 19p from Steven J. Green,

is due soon, too.

RAMROD ≠2 (12p for 8 A5 pages from Brian Bonhomme, 99 Cook's Spinney, Harlow, Essex CM20 3BN) is a promising start--the first issue was the free "Ramrod Fan Sheet". A 3-page "Secret Origin of Bem" article by Martin Lock is perhaps the main selling point, but good art by Phil Elliott, Bob Watkins, & Martin Noone, plus reviews by Laurence Bowkett and, on fanzines, Brian himself are strong points too. And that fills my space. See you soon! -ED SALLIS

BEM BACK ISSUES STRIKE AGAIN!

We've still got copies of Bems 1, 3, 7 to 10, & 12 to 15, including "The UK Heroine Addict", the Captain Frog saga (so far), the "Weird Trash" Bem spoof, Nige Edwards interviewing HTD, and assorted articles, strips, comment and fan art--practically a history of the last 4 years of fandom! These ten back issues, over 200 pages, can be yours for £1.10--or if you're sending in a subscription as well (£1 for 5 issues until January 1st, then £1 for 4), just send a total of £2.00! Bems 12 to 15 are also available individually, at 20p each.

Martin Lock.

MAGUS

MAGUS is a new fanzine with plenty of comic strips, reviews, articles, etc by some of the top names in fandom. In the first issue there are strips which deal with such varied subjects as superheroics, sf, fantasy, and humour. For your copy send 25p (postal order, cheque or taped down coins) to:

Philip Greenaway

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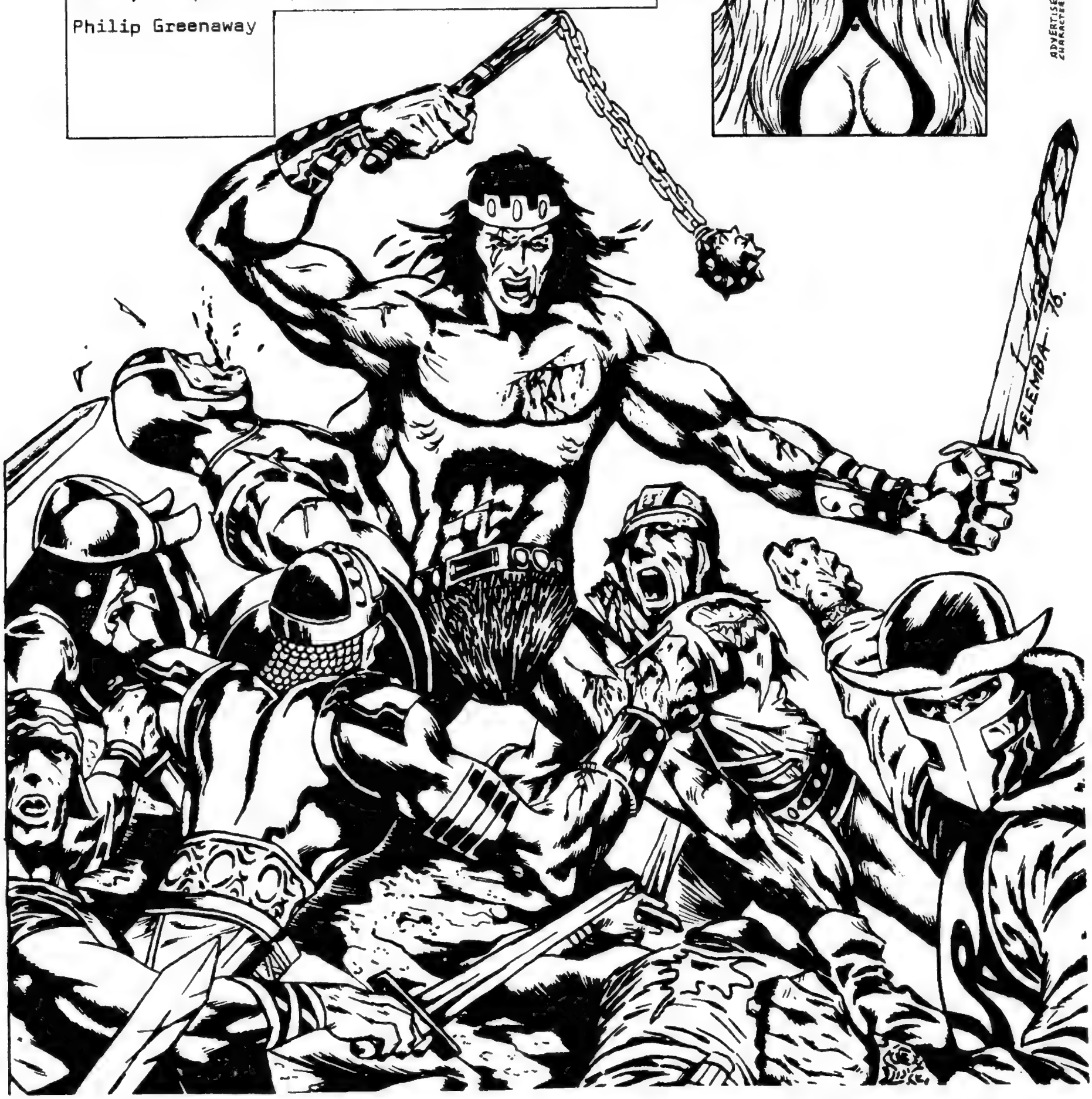

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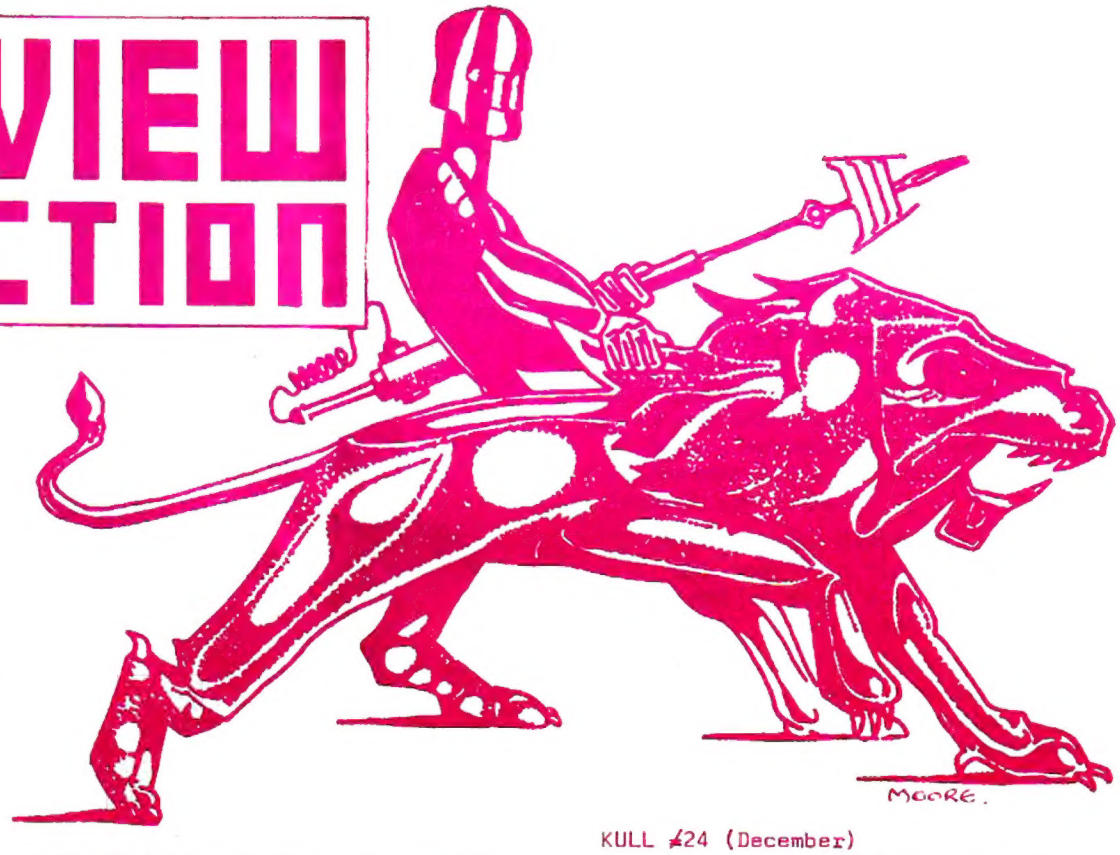

X-MEN ≠108 (December)
"Armageddon Now" by Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin

An issue dedicated to the departed Dave Cockrum, as Byrne and Austin take over. Chris finally finishes off one of the 85 sub-plots, but starts another few for good measure. The lettercol hints at eventual monthlyness--they'll need it to wrap all this up before present readers collect their pensions. Claremont isn't Marvel's greatest scripter, but he can do a good Marvel-style story, with Len Wein-type plotting and Steve Englehart-type sub-plotting and characterisation -- like a superior Conway or a junior Thomas (get me? Oh, never mind). As for Byrne, well it's not Rog-2000 (couldn't Marvel buy over all those great Charlton strips and revive them?). Still, with Austin's inks it's always good and often breathtaking, especially near the end of the book. As for the actual storyline -- read it yourself. It's worth it. -Barry K. Winetrobe

More cosmic capers with the misguided mutants by the symbiotic C & B team. An above average issue this, with Claremont wisely concentrating on the most interesting character, the Phoenix (my prejudices for the original team showing through), and Byrne producing more stunning visuals --Cockrum won't be missed. If Phoenix is in such prominence in future, I might even get used to the newer mutants appearing every other page or so. -Laurence Bowkett

ASTERIX AND CAESAR'S GIFT
by Goscinny & Uderzo (hardback, Hodder & Stoughton 1977, £1.80)

A group of legionaries have served the full 20 years in the armies of Rome--and Julius Caesar himself gives them their honesta missio (demob), along with their grant of land. However, one man is such a drunkard that his land-grant is "a little Gaulish village surrounded by fortified Roman camps"--which has to be the home of Asterix & Company, yes?

And so another fine and funny Asterix adventure, originally published in France in 1974 (see "Made In Britain" last time for more details), invades our shores in high good humour. Tremensdelirious trades his land-deed to a tavern-keeper for an evening's drink, and so it's the landlord (plus wife and beautiful daughter) who arrive at the Gaulish village, claiming to own it. But it's the final 80% of the book, set inside the village, that has the real fun!

Okay, £1.80 for 44 pages of story is an expensive way to buy comics; the way to start off Asterix-reading is with the 50p colour paperbacks, then graduating to the 8½" x 11½" size paperbacks which are up to about 85p now. But you certainly owe it to yourself to sample the adventures of the gallant Gaul! -Ruan Lanihorne

ISIS ≠8 (January--Happy New Year!)
"Darkly Through The Mutant's Eyes" by Jack C. Harris, Vosburg & Milgrom
'The Isis Review I Could Write', or 'Since the First Issue Was Reviewed This Way, Why Not the Last...?'

This book was doomed from the start--although it always had nice art. No direction could be found, and so, the whole thing was bound to sooner or later fall apart.

Soon Isis' twisted Egyptian lore, will see the light of day no more. Old plot threads, I'm sad to say, are left dangling all the way, with no regard for what went before.

Watch this tale of a mutant wend, until it drives you round the bend. Although the art is pretty good, it doesn't match Wally Wood--I was quite glad to reach, THE END

(And if you think that my verse, could not really be any worse, I'll assure you that it would -- if I did as I liked and crammed as many words into the last line as I possibly could...) -Robin A! Webster

BULLET ≠81 (August 27th, 7p)

After the comments on British comics by Ruan Lanihorne, I bought the new (to me) comic BULLET. I found it--interesting... I guess if you enjoy the superb characterisation in ALL STAR COMICS, DETECTIVE & AQUAMAN you may be well advised to give this a miss -- then again, I also enjoy those titles, and I liked it...somewhat. Most of the art is very good, I prefer it to the American art in fact--but frankly the stories are poor. Not surprisingly, though, as 'Tasker' and 'Young Fireball' have only 3 pages each! Talking of 'Young Fireball', he has to have the most banal story-line of all; he's in the "trapped-in-a-cellar-with-water-flooding-in" old routine, and gets free only to face the "trained to kill" leopards of the Catwoman type villainess. Yawn!

I won't say this mag hasn't got any potential -- it has. But at the moment it just isn't a patch on the IPC weekly SF comic, 2000 A.D. -David Edge

KULL ≠24 (December)
"Screams in the Dark" by Don Glut, Ernie Chan, and Dino Castrillo

Well, the interminable saga grinds on inexorably... I reckon at this rate we might just see the conclusion to this storyline before we, or more likely this book, expire of old age--though after all this time, I for one really don't care how it turns out. -A.L. Wilkie-Smith

KUNG FU FIGHTER ≠18 (December)
"The Secret of the Bronze Tiger" by Denny O'Neil & Ric Estrada

Denny promises on the letters page that although this is the book's last issue, Dragon will be back. Spare us the agony, O'Neil! All we need is another knock-em-down-on-every-page type cash-in on the martial arts craze! The craze has almost finished now, so Richard Dragon's time is up too.

This book has been quite similar to Kirby's latest Marvel work, so slip-shod and cliché-ridden that it could be read in under ten minutes. The Estrada art is so empty and amateurish that one feels this was one of the cheapest jobs ever.

In all the 18 issues we haven't moved forward an inch; Dragon, Ben, and Lady Shiva are still deciding if they all love or hate each other, and the aimless fights go on. This final issue has 11 out of 17 pages full of violent foot-kicking and neck-chopping that we could all do well without--in fact, it's the sort of comic that gives the industry a bad name. -JG

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL ≠2 (1977)
"Death Watch" by Starlin & Rubinstein

A conclusion to the Warlock/Cap Marvel/Thanos battle from AVENGERS ANNUAL, this book, like previous Thanos epics, guest-stars almost everybody. The art (finished nicely by Joe Rubinstein) contains all the usual Starlin tricks, especially in layout--see pages 35 and 37. My only gripe is the overexposure of Spider-Man--whose team-up book is this, anyway? Surely Two In One isn't in circulation trouble -- I hope not. -Barry K. Winetrobe

HOT STUF' #4 (Spring, $1.50)

A lush production, which should be outstanding -- yet turns out to be rather ordinary. It starts well enough, with a nice Ken Barr cover, but continues with a cosmic/witchcraft yarn (by J. S. Strnad & Bob Kline) which conjures up an intense feeling of deja vu, and a 10-page story by Toth which is nice but unsurprising. Gray Morrow's "Orion" story (Chapter III) is so obviously a slice of a full story that it hurts; better is "Kenshi Blade" by Dr William Stillwell, and better still "Mercy" by Bob Keenan & Ernie Colón, but the most interesting part of the mag is a six-page preview of "Scarecrow", a "book in progress", which must prove something.

-Laurence Bowkett

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #25 (December)
"Jewels of Gwahlur" by Thomas and Giordano; "The Cold Hands of Death" by Glut, Gan & Castrillo

The mag for lovers of sex and violence. Let me not be too hypocritical here; I enjoy the odd bit of sex and violence (in fictional form...) just as much as the next freak, er reader, but here we are getting into the realms of "sexploitation" as the phrase has it. In the Solomon Kane tale especially, the S & S element has to take a back seat--and while this may make for an interesting tale in its own way (quite fascinating, actually--I'd love to know what Fredric Wertham would make of it), it's not really what this magazine is supposed to be about.

Is it? -Sam Willik

DOCTOR STRANGE #26 (December)
"The Return of the Ancient One" by Jim Starlin & Rudy Nebres

The title says it all!

Unfortunately. Somehow I can't believe in a corporeal Ancient One nowadays, and certainly not as a bowery drunk, after all the pains Englehart took over him. Jim's version makes him like the Starlin FU Manchu from MoKF, not the aged sage that Lee & Ditko created.

Nebres did the finished art, and I'm rapidly getting bored with him. Somehow, the book has lost the innocence of the early Ditko days without holding on to the graphic sophistication of Colan/Palmer (the best in the west) or Brunner. Maybe I'm getting cynical in my old age, but this book hasn't been the same since Englehart left, except for last year's Annual by Craig Russell. -BKW

DETECTIVE COMICS #474 (December)
"The Deadshot Ricochet" by Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers & Terry Austin

What can you say about the best comic in current production? Englehart gets beneath the Batman's skin, turning out the sort of mag I'm sure he always wanted to read himself. Batman at last acting naturally towards Robin; Batman scaring the crap out of an adversary just by standing near him; Batman in love; THE Batman. Deadshot is almost incidental, but the story is quite magically old-fashioned -- a fight on a giant typewriter, which types "DC" as the two protagonists land on the keys--though including the best of present-day professionalism. All this, plus Silver knows Bruce is Bats, and the Joker next issue. It's no good, I gotta read it again! BUY IT! -Laurence Bowkett

MARVEL PREMIERE #39 (December)
The Torpedo in "Ride A Wild Rocket" by Marv Wolfman, Bob Brown & Al Milgrom

Ho-hum. Tedium time again, folks... I probably wouldn't mind so much about the irrationality of the plot, and its inane meanderings, if it weren't so boring!

Sorry Torp, but you've got absolutely nothing going for you, 'cept for the rather nice costume.

A miss. Next, please. -Mike Hallitwist

THE PANELOLOGIST #8 (Sept-Oct 1977)
25p by post from George Barnett.

A
new
Panny
is what
we do all
need now and
again, with a
choice group of
opinion pieces by
George and others,
the most influential
fanzine review section
in town, 4 pages of letters
in the usual tiny type, and
even smidgeons of news and fan
art. If only it could appear as
regularly as CMN, it would be the
comics fanzine, as it is now calling
itself--as it is it's a treat when it
does appear, and I recommend it to
everyone who can buy more than one
fanzine. After microscopic type
and a lack of proper reverence
to Dez Skinn, Panelologist
is best known for the many
inventive layouts George
constructs -- how does
he do it, I wonder?
All those slanting
columns and the
arrow shapes
would drive
me batty,
so I'll
cease
now
! -Trick Loman

WARLORD #10 (January)
"Tower Of Fear" by Mike Grell

More dynamic art, with a less dynamic script. With three full-pagers, a double-pager, abnormally large panels, and a minimum of script, it's a lightweight if visually pleasing effort, more a series of posters than a comic. Still, it's one of the more enjoyable mags available. -LB

LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY: "Fort Navajo" by Charlier & Giraud (paperback, Egmont/Methuen 1977, 85p)

The format's the same as with Asterix, and the translators are still Anthea Bell & Derek Hockridge, but the 46 full-colour pages here aren't comedy. Realistically drawn by Jean Giraud, and scripted in the tradition of the best Hollywood western mythology by Jean Michel Charlier, here we have the new officer going to the fort deep in Indian territory--and lots more. I should warn you that the book ends on a cliff-hangar, so let's hope that the next book in the series (there are at least ten) comes along pretty soon.

By the way, HEAVY METAL readers, Jean Giraud also uses the name "Moebius" -- a versatile fellow! -Ruan Lanihorne

JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS #7 (Dec)
"Dejah Thoris Lives" by Marv Wolfman, Gil Kane & Tom Sutton

Reading this series I get a constant impression of unpleasantness, barbarity, bigotry, and stupidity -- and that's just from the hero! (I'm coming back to you, Conan, ALL is forgiven!)

I was against this project before it started, because I couldn't see any point in going over stale ground (if you'll excuse the mixed metaphor). Little did I dream how much more stale and unpleasant it could be made.

Here's to its demise; may it be sooner not later. Perhaps the continued absence of a lettercol is a good omen, in this respect... -Wallie Mikthis

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #149 (Dec)
"The Face of the Star-Tsar" by Steve Englehart, Dillin & McLaughlin

Another very fine Englehart story. It may superficially be a normal JLA plot, with Dr Light as villain, but Steve uses the extra pages to great effect; there's a new villain in the Star-Tsar, and the return of Snapper Carr...

As always with Englehart, 'tis the characterisation that makes the story. Red Tornado acting more and more like the Vision, despairing at his lack of "humanity"; a look at Flash and Superman doing their superdeeds from the inside; and more details of the new Privateer -- who seems a bit like Nomad transferred à la Willow/Mantis. Dillin does his usual, as does Buckler on the cover. Definitely one of the most competent books of the month.

Buy it! -Barry K. Winetrobe

FRANK FRAZETTA: BOOK TWO
Peacock/Bantam; £2.95, 9" x 11"

What does one have to say? There are 32 colour plates here, plus three close-ups from particularly interesting paintings, and a dozen black & white drawings; they come from paperbacks, and magazines (and I wish they'd say where--the title given here for each piece is by no means always the book's title), and they'll knock your eyes out. There's adventure, super-heroic action, drama, and the most sensuous girls ever to wield a dagger; alien landscapes and unearthly monsters. A langorous naked "Golden Girl"--a G.I. in bloody combat.

Don't be put off by the front cover, a sub-standard illo in my opinion--there's some really prime Frazetta here, and at below 10p a print, it's a bargain. Buy an extra copy to cut up and frame! -RL

TALE-ENDERS

The trouble with leaving this column to the end, mainly because there was always another page ready for typing up, is that it becomes a repository for various odds and ends of information that would be more appropriate elsewhere. Phil Hartley wants me to mention that, while the next issue of GALAXY-Z won't be out until around next August, an 8-page fill-in will appear soon after Christmas, with letters and Steven J. Green's "Reality Plus" column 14p from Phil.

And let's start the reviewing with a zine that would be more in Ruan's "Made In Britain" line.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN ≠1 (UK, 40p) has all 45 pages of "Iron Shadows In The Moon" by Thomas, Buscema & Alcala, from issue 4 of the American black & white, complete with original cover and photo lead-in. A double-spread map of the world of Conan's time by Tim Conrad (from issue 9), one ad page, a "coming next issue" page for "The Citadel At the Centre of Time" (from issue 7), and a back cover pin-up, and that's your lot, except for the pull-out 16" by 21" poster (originally ≠9's cover)--there is no introduction or explanation for the new British audience the mag has got to attract as to just what is going on here --not even Stan's usual welcome. The paper is not as good, and the printing likewise can get a little dark in places -- but I would dearly like to see the mag succeed, and really get the ball rolling for good, adult comic monthlies in this country.

You'll have seen the ads, I expect, for PIZZAZZ, the new American Marvel magazine aiming at the younger audience--it's only for the more extreme Marvel completists. Articles on TV and sports are mixed with occasional Spider-Man puzzles, while Dave Kraft takes over the scripting of a single page of "Young Tarzan" (drawn by Buscema & Chan) from Roy Thomas with the second issue. Or does a new STAR WARS adventure, advancing three pages a month, by Roy, Howie Chaykin, & Tony DeZuniga tempt you? It's bound to be reprinted somewhere...

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE ≠1 (Feb) looks an interesting new book -- David Michelinie wrote it, and Val Mayerik drew it, so it

isn't exactly ordinary. There are slight echoes of DC's old "gothic" titles of five years ago, while the Doorway's proprietor, Madame Xanadu, is reminiscent of Phantom Stranger; I do hope this doesn't turn into another UNEXPECTED, as it is it's rather nice. The Hallowe'en HOUSE OF MYSTERY ≠256 (Feb) has a Wrightson cover again, by the way, plus Nino and all the regulars.

Talking of the Phantom Stranger, he and Deadman are the stars of DC SUPER-STARS ≠18, the final issue--it too is a special Hallowe'en story, drawn by Romeo Tanghal and scripted & inked by Pasko & Giordano (Deadman's 17 pages) and Conway & Layton (PS's 12, and a 5-page team-up), and what is more it's another in the long line of Rutland "Hi I'm Your Host Tom Fagan" tales --Pasko, Levitz, and Gerry & Carla Conway are on hand, not to mention Terry Thirteen, assorted demons and gargoyles, and Tala, the Stranger's long-time enemy. Nice!

TOMB OF DRACULA ≠62 (Jan) is well up to the usual Wolfman/Colan/Palmer standard, with the Lord of Vampires and his sworn foe, his son enmeshed in a deeper evil--one that can destroy them both! Expect a member of Jack Russell's supporting cast to appear, as well.

X-MEN ≠108 (Dec) is the first issue to be drawn by John Byrne and Terry Austin, with Dave Cockrum cutting his artistic output to covers and occasional fill-ins across the Marvel line -- as you'd expect from the team that brought us the recent Starlord issue of MARVEL PREVIEW, the art continues to be excellent, matching Chris Claremont's script perfectly. It's one of my favourite books -- I hope the shift to monthly status doesn't harm it.

RAMPAGING HULK ≠6 is quite a nice mag; you get 36 pages of Hulk's first meeting with the Sub-Mariner, by Moench, Pollard & DeZuniga, plus 18 pages of Bloodstone by Warner, Al Kupperberg & Sonny Trinidad --by my counting, that means it's better value than three 35c comics! A pity this magazine's being cancelled -- I blame the choice of the almost unknown Bloodstone as back-feature, instead of Starlord or some other black & white project, and the unconventional art in the early issues.

Next, may I recommend to you "The Pit And The Pendulum", alias MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS ≠28? Don McGregor's the scripter, and besides a 24-page adaptation of the title story, there's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (15 pages) and, drawn by Mike Golden, "The Cask of Amontillado" (9 pages). No fan of Dauntless Don should miss them!

Mentioning Mike Golden reminds me that he drew Rich Morrissey's "Hell Of A Place" for SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE ≠10--one of the freshest, most entertaining tales of a deal with the devil I've ever read. In fact, the plot twists are, er, diabolical?

So, that fills another issue of Bem to the brim--but don't worry, another issue will be along in a couple of months. -ML

"LOOKING FOR A GOOD TIME?"

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